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The Changing Aspects of Nature in Art

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THE CHANGING ASPECTS OF NATURE IN ART

by

Donald C. Grandbois

B.F.A., Minneapolis School of Art 1963

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

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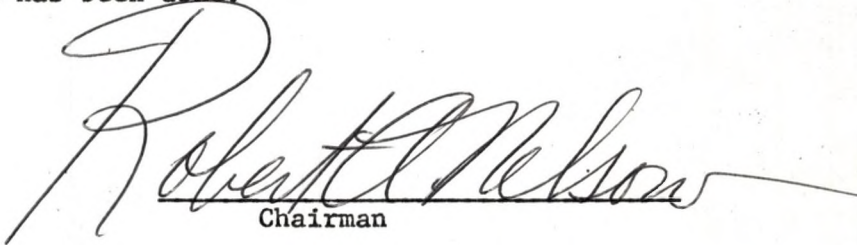
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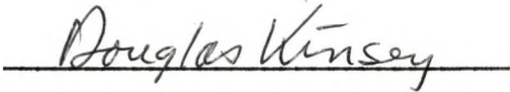
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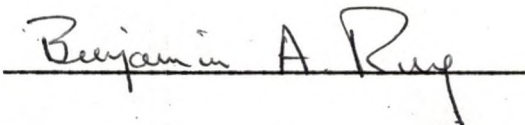
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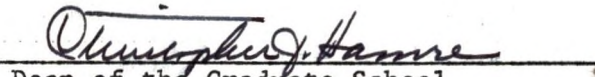
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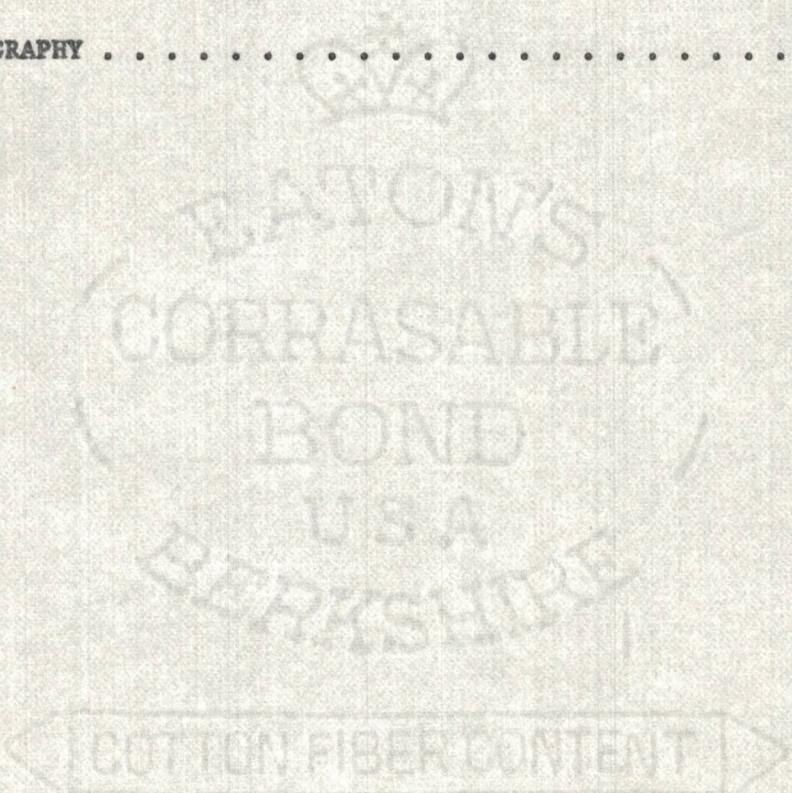
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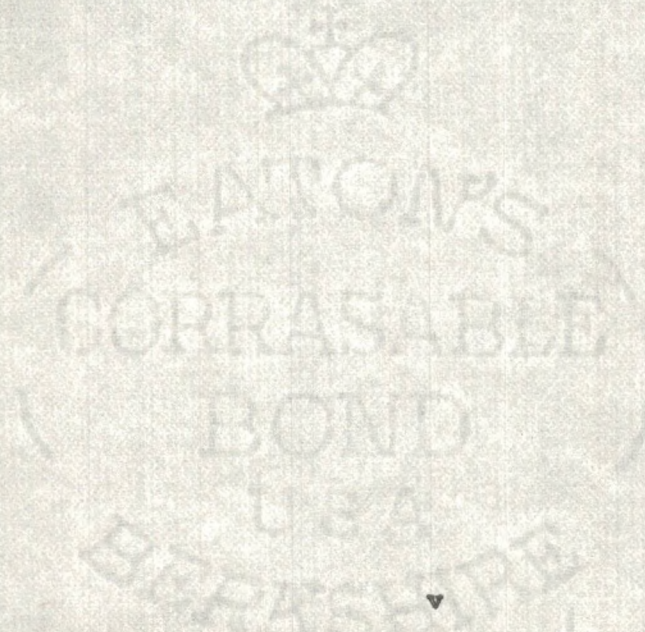
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explain my theory of painting. Why I paint as I do is a complex matter. My painting is neither accidental nor the tracing of surface reality. Neither my painting techniques nor the philosophy which guides them is purely spontaneous. On the contrary, both have consciously evolved out of the past. In this study I attempt to explain all the elements on which I have drawn on in my search for expression.

(1) While my philosophy is expressive of the realities of this atomic age, it is still aware of Plato's insight into reality.

(2) While my techniques are somewhat in keeping with modern expressionism, they are definitely modified by classical overtones.

(3) While my philosophy controls which I see, while my techniques control how I express what I see, and while I am not at all satisfied that I have achieved a proper fusion of these elements, the product bears that modification of those elements which make my unique expression.

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

In the years that I have been striving to become a competent painter, I have attempted to discover a sound way to look at the subject matter which I hope to express through painting. As a result, I turned to men who had expended their best philosophical efforts to perceive our relationship to the world in which we live. According to R. G. Collingwood, there are three distinct conceptions of nature and the world: the Greco-Roman concept, the Baroque concept, and the Modern Evolutionary concept.¹

Heinrich Wölfflin suggests that the first of these concepts might be communicated through the classical mode of expressing objects as individual items set apart from other objects in rigid patterns in order to give a static, disjointed impression.² The second of these concepts tended to be communicated through the Romantic mode of fusing patterns in order to give a dynamic, collective impression.³ In modern times, however, these two modes of representation have moderated somewhat. The Romantic faction has turned to various forms of expressionism. On the other hand, the formalists patterned themselves after

¹R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of Nature, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 1-13.

²Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History, trans. M. D. Hottinger, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), pp. 14-18.

³Wölfflin, pp. 14-15.

Cezanne. The Romantic faction tended to express nature emotionally; conversely, the formalists tended to represent nature rationally.

After examining the Classical (Greco-Roman), the Romantic (Baroque), and the Modern Evolutionary views of nature, I shall try to relate these concepts to my changing philosophy of art. One should consider that while a work of art may reflect the surface features associated with its historical period, it also is capable of objectifying the inner image of the man who painted it. As subtle as it is self-revealing, art requires, if it is to be understood, a way of seeing which is strikingly different from our usual way of viewing historical events.

An artist is an unusual being. He feels a need to communicate something to his fellow man. Of course, the assertion of his individuality, modified by the unconscious influences of his racial and cultural milieu, makes his art diverse and rich. The artist's environment must be sifted through his prejudices and biases before he can attempt to express it. His reactions to his environment force him, consciously or unconsciously, to take some stand on the vital ideas of his own age. Many of his reactions are a natural result of his social and intellectual training. The artist also reacts to the impact of the collective unconscious of his own society. As an individual, he attempts to assert himself. He attempts to render the images he perceives in the physical world; but they change in the process. They are distorted by the artist's emotions, sensations and ideas. Wanting to express states of emotion, the artist usually uses scenes or images: "Thus the image aroused by a certain emotional state may serve to express the state itself."¹

¹Julie Vogelstein-Braun, Art Image of the West, (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc.), p. 313.

Clearly, a work of art should be viewed on two major levels: the objective and the subjective. Emotions can be felt by any man with sensitivity; they are universal and are manifested by the most primitive man. The artist expresses emotional states of which he may be consciously unaware, but he has a strong drive to search out the unknown and give it substance and shape. He attempts to transform this "unknown" into a material substance which he hopes will communicate to others as a subjective reality. "Seeing is a give and take, sensuous passivity and intellectual action, the result being a highly subjective and, in a sense, our own creation."²

In spite of the form it may take, art is primarily an attempt to materialize the inner states of man. A painting is a reconstructed image. The artist puts life into images and thereby offers a part of himself to his fellow man.

²Vogelstein-Braun, p. 14.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION FROM THE CLASSICAL TO THE BAROQUE

The classical philosophers felt that both nature and man were ordered and regulated by a Divine Intelligence. The movement of nature was dominated by this order. Plato felt the world of nature was an organism with mind and soul.

But we shall affirm that the cosmos more than aught else, resembles most closely that Living Creature of which all other living creatures, severally and generically, are portions. For that Living Creature embraces and contains within itself all the intelligible Living Creatures, just as this Universe contains us and all the other visible living creatures that have been fashioned.¹

When the Greeks attempted to express the Soul of the Universe, they could only do so through a highly rationalized use of the imagination. Therefore they imposed an idealized standardization on what they represented of Nature. The Greeks imposed, for example, a mathematical order (The Greek Canons) on the proportions of the figure. This was true in vase painting, in sculpture, and in other forms of art. Greeks dominated their forms intellectually. In short, Greek art was an idealized reality.

In the early Italian Renaissance, a high degree of intellectualism was imposed on the art of painting. Neo-platonic ideas ruled, and it followed that ideal beauty continued to be the aesthetic standard.

¹Plato, Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles, Trans. by R. G. Bury, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), p. 57.

In the Renaissance painting, there was a second element which sometimes clashed with the intellectual ideal. That contending element called for the scientific representation of reality. The discovery of the Basic Laws of Perspective encouraged the study of visual perception and reproduction. Masaccio's fresco of the Trinity in the church of St. Maria Novella of Florence serves as an example. This Fresco, executed with vanishing point and horizontal plane, lowered the viewer's level. This is the earliest evidence of the perspective theory developed by Brunellesco (1377-1476). Ucello in 1436 painted a statue projecting optically from the wall on the lower base of the John Hawkwood Monument in the Cathedral of Florence.¹

Those artists capable of reproducing things skillfully enough to give the illusion of reality encouraged the view that such skill was itself the goal of art. It is not until the last half of the fifteenth century that illusionistic perspective became established as a distinct method and was the predominant means of art until the twentieth century. Thus, the creation of geometric space became a discipline that led many artists to think that objective reality was an end in itself. Examples of such artists are Francesco de Giorgio and Melozzo da Forlì; their frescoes can be seen at the Vatican Library. However, the greater artists broke through this restriction and restored painting to its expressive value.²

Nature preoccupied the minds of the Renaissance man. Pastoral poets and painters alike tried to show the order and logic expressed

¹Encyclopedia of Art, Vol. 9, (New York: McGraw, Hill, Inc. 1945), p. 345.

²Pero della Franchesca, who experimented with perspective, somehow went beyond objective perspective, creating a highly individual statement. Michaelangelo and DeVinci were late Renaissance artists who worked with other ideas beyond objective perspective.

by a creator or Ruler of the Universe. Again the classical view of nature became "saturated and permeated by mind."¹ The mind of nature as reflected in the mind of man, gives order to the universe and makes the discipline of science possible. Plato had seen "the mind" as imposing a seven sphere universe with a pervading soul.²

There was an exhaustive striving for the pictorial illusion of reality in purely logical terms. As a result, mere technical accuracy resulted in meaningless and unimaginative art. Much of this art ceased to communicate anything subjectively. The average painter became so restricted by classical formulas that he ceased to express anything which was uniquely his own. What he did express was a meticulously careful representation of nature. Because such an artist did not deal with obscure human emotions, he felt that he had to ignore the subjective and thereby restrict reality to a rational, measurable level.

Such striving for insight into Plato's Soul of the Universe eventually evolved into the Baroque concept. This concept still maintained a high regard for nature, but was moderated by Christian thought. Nature was only a lovely creation of God -- not God's organic body. All of the regularity in nature's functions were thought to have been imposed by an external deity -- they were not an expression of an internal and pervading mind of the Universe. Scientists like Copernicus (1473-1543), Telesio (1508-1588), and

¹Collingwood, p. 14

²Plato, The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett, 2 vols., (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 37.

Bruno (1548-1600) even went so far as to deny that "the world of nature, the world studied by physical science, is an organism."¹ They further asserted that it was "devoid both of intelligence and of life."² Nature was not an organism, but a machine designed and operated by the Divine Architect.

Baroque art usually had a highly visual but transitory sense of reality. It depicted nature in all of its movement and change. Feeling a surge of life which was beyond his control, the Baroque artist felt almost swept away by the forces of nature. While intoxicated by the intensity of life and death he both relished and feared the power of nature. In contrast, the earlier classical artist had set nature down in rigid composition, restricting or concealing nature behind the mask of the Greek Canons. The classical landscape was comparatively unimportant and uninteresting, being used only as a backdrop for grouping of figures. On the other hand, the artist of the Baroque period, feeling that he was an integral part of nature, became emotionally involved with the idea of the dynamic flux of nature.

Before the end of the Baroque period, the dualism between mind and matter was more strongly asserted. Eighteenth century philosophers tried to reason how mind could have a connection with anything alien to itself -- something physical such as nature. They tended to deny that the Divine Intelligence was a mere portion of

¹Collingwood, p. 5.

²Collingwood, p. 5.

organic nature. Kant, Hume, Berkeley, and Hegel eventually deduced that "mind makes nature -- that nature is, so to speak, a by-product of the autonomous and self-existing activity of mind."¹

¹Collingwood, p. 7.

CHAPTER III

FURTHER EVOLUTION: MODERN CONCEPTS

The modern concepts of nature is evolutionary. When viewing any portion of nature, the artist is aware of process or motion within it. It is classified by its function, not its structure. "The conception of a natural substance is resolved into a conception of some kind of natural function."¹ Such functions are expressed in movements. Since functional movements occur at specified times and in restricted spaces, their existence is limited; they must be isolated and immobilized in order to be expressed. Before Lamarck (in 1809) and Darwin (in 1859) introduced their theories of evolution, men thought of Nature as inflexible and unchanging. However, these evolutionists pointed out that much which had been assumed to be constant was actually subject to change.

While the Greeks had believed in continuous change, they had thought of this change as operating in a fixed cycle -- from A to B and from B back to A again. For example, man is separated out of nature at birth and is returned at death -- with grandfather, father, and son being mere repetitions operating in the fixed cycle.

In contrast, the modern view does recognize that change can include evolution into forms which differ from those of the ancestor. Now nature is not viewed as a mere machine. It organically changes itself. Moreover, while it is working, it does not wear out. It

¹Collingwood, p. 7.

restores itself and develops its own improvements. The concept of evolution was developed mainly by biologists. Biology had, in the eighteenth century, traced evolution in plant and organic life, in the person of Darwin, had suggested evolution in man and animals. Prior to this time, plant and animal life had generally been thought to be fixed forms. Mutations had merely been considered mistakes. In observing evolutionary nature, biologists observed a striving for newer and better forms of life within nature.

Bergson (1859-1941) made wide use of the concept of biological evolution in his philosophy. He tried to synthesize a dualism within nature between matter and the life force. He said that matter is a by-product of the life force.

Matter is a sort of devitalized life and hence exhibits a steady degeneration of energy as described by the second law of thermodynamics. There is still a ceaseless movement, but in a direction opposite to that of life.

Matter if moved by a sufficient cause, is pushed or pulled into action; but life moves of itself because of its own inner volition.

There is a reality that is external and yet given immediately to the mind. -- This reality is mobility. Not things made but things in the making, not self maintaining states, but only changing states exist. Rest is never more than apparent, or rather relative.

His concept of this life force influenced his theory of knowledge -- that we can only know through our intuition. Intuitively, this life force enters things and thereby knows them. In other words, this intuitive life force that is in the thing examined shares a mystic oneness with the examiner; on the other hand, the rational approach

¹Henri Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics, (Indianapolis: The Liberal Arts Press, Inc.)1955, p. 18.

²Bergson, p. 49.

to knowledge rests on rigid concepts.¹ Although Bergson's theories are a part of modern evolutionary cosmology, he disregarded the problem of inorganic matter. His theories were extreme -- he classified everything into a part of organized life. To the other extreme, the materialists of a century before had lumped the whole world into a concept of inorganic matter. Modern physics had discovered that matter is actually quite similar to Bergson's concept of the living organism in a continuous process of activity. Physicists attempt "to resolve all substance into function."² Consequently, "all natural functions are forms of motion."³

In the mind of man there has always been a dichotomy between the individual and the universe. It usually manifested itself in these two ways: a subjective groping towards the inner world of the emotions and a rational analysis of the objective outer universe. Some who have searched for a direct and internal experience have attempted to communicate through expressionism; others, using an indirect sensory experience of material objects, have turned to conceptual art.

There is a discrepancy between the "I" of personal consciousness and the "non-I" of the external world which art attempts to unite. Ordinary people get along well in the world as long as they do not think about this discrepancy. But if they do think, this discrepancy becomes the source of their unhappiness. Art, as well

¹Collingwood, p. 133

²Collingwood, p. 23

³Collingwood, p. 23

as religion and philosophy, attempt to resolve this discrepancy.

Philosophers have felt a strong obligation to attempt to pierce the wall between the worlds. Philosophers of the nineteenth century were no less concerned with this problem. After attempts -- by Fichte (1762-1814), Schopenhaur (1788-1860), Hegel (1770-1831), and Nietzsche (1844-1900) -- to bridge the gap between man and nature, a spirit of pessimism began to manifest itself. The melancholy of Dostoevski (1821-1881), Kafka (1833-1924), and Chekhov (1860-1904) encouraged similar expression in art. The scholarly interpretation of history, the evolutionary theory of life, the impact of Freud in psychology, the onslaught of science, and the effects of World Wars and the Industrial Revolution have caused men to take a completely new outlook on life and on the cosmos.

Just prior to modern times, man had begun to think himself as capable of anything; modern man, on the other hand, seems to be less optimistic. Dismayed by surface progress, early twentieth century painters became introspective. For example, the German Expressionists turned to subconscious promptings and to the world of intuitive and primitive magical art forms -- perhaps because the rest of the world seemed to analytical and rational. Because of the theory of continual change, life becomes tenuous; ideas that were stable are now subject to change. It was the breakdown of the classical concepts of a stable nature that has helped to create enormous disturbances in the nineteenth century and today.

It is a sombre, passionate art, the art of van Gogh, Lovis Corinth, Edvard Munch, Ernst Josephson, the later Turner, James Ensor, Oskar Kokoschka, the painters of Die Brucke, Roualt, the early Chagall, Jack B. Yeats, Soutine, in which

spiritual experience asserts itself against the tyranny of mathematical thought, belief in causality, and technical progress, in fact, against the mechanization of civilization.¹

The expressionists reacted to the loss of this old concept of nature. Disturbed by the loss, the expressionist painters asked themselves what it was that had kept people going in the past. What had been their hope? Historically, men have turned to myths. For example, the cave man used them in art for their magical powers over environment; the Renaissance man painted Christian myths. In turn, the expressionist painter felt that, stripped of the rational, there must be some underlying archetype that runs through the myths which men dig out of their subconscious minds. Indeed, Freud has found basic drives, desires, and fears that have been basic in mankind from the beginning of its existence. Man has attempted to impose a rational explanation on these drives in the form of myth making.

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind -- Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic, ring of myth.²

For the expressionist, the only way to bridge the gap between man and nature, between man and God, and between man and man was through an expression of the subconscious promptings of the self. This they were doing in search for the foundation on which both life and man exist. All past art was perhaps, capable of communicating at the intuitive level; but traditionally this level of meaning has

¹J. P. Hodin, The Dilemma of Being Modern, (New York: Noonday Press, 1959), p. 60.

²Joseph Campbell, The Hero With A Thousand Faces, (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 3.

been clothed in accepted myths and customs imposed by society. Now the expressionists -- with no mythology, with literally nothing structural on which to hang the form -- have attempted a new form of communication. The elements of art have been stripped to the core: color, line and planes are all that is left to work with and to express the frustrations, fears and anxieties of the time. The artist is left only to reach into himself for anything expressible or meaningful to himself and to hope that it may be meaningful to others. So we see the artist reaching into himself and trying to express what he finds there. Art, especially in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, was open to many influences. The museums were filled with traditional art -- Classical, Baroque, Romantic, Impressionistic and Post-Impressionistic; there was also the impact of primitive tribal Africal art and Far-eastern art. The painter was now able to see history in panorama.

Although expressionism has some roots imbedded in traditional art, it was far from a romantic development. There was an additional, nihilistic quality characteristic in the northern temperament -- these characteristics were associated with Romantic melancholy.

The early expressionists were influenced in a very direct way by the Jugendstil or Art Nouveau, a symbolist movement which began in literature. This symbolism quickly moved to other art forms. Some consider the symbolist as merely an early form of expressionism. An early symbolistic painter, Paul Gauguin, used line and color symbolically, as did Munch, who symbolized the inner life of psychological situations.

The Art Nouveau symbolists were looking for new forms of decoration, discarding the forms of traditional ornamentation. They were concerned with those elements of design which are accepted as design fundamentals today. These elements were expressed in broad color planes, simplified shapes, the inter-relation of positive-negative space, free forms, and a maintenance of the two-dimensional format. These designers evolved, as early as 1903, into two distinct groups. One group of Art Nouveau, led by Otto Eckmann in Germany, expressed itself with a highly decorative, floral, and natural style. The other group, that of Van de Volde, developed a more abstract decorative quality. Both groups discarded the illusion of three-dimensional space and tended to rely solely on the emotional impact of line. Abstract woodcuts were made as early as 1893 by Van de Vilde for a Flemish publication. August Endell, a German leader of the abstract Art Nouveau, was a prophet of the Bauhaus school of Klee and Kandinski and of the abstract formalist art of Mondrian and also, to some extent, abstract expressionism. In 1898 Endell wrote:

We stand on the threshold of an altogether new art with forms which mean or represent nothing, recall nothing, yet which can stimulate our souls as deeply as only the tones of music have been able to do.¹

Almost all of these men of the Art Nouveau were in the fine arts at one time and had turned to architecture and design. The later German expressionists group, on the other hand, were trained architects who turned painters. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity I have grouped symbolism and expressionism together under the title of Art Nouveau. All three share a concern for form and

¹Peter Selz, German Expressionist Painting, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 56.

its potentialities. The Art Nouveau movement was consciously trying to break away from the tradition of constantly reviving century old traditions. They were trying to create a distinct contemporary movement. Although it was short lived, it made many contributions to the expressionist ideas and to present day art education.

Der Brück ("The Bridge"), a later expressionist movement, was founded in Germany in 1905. While it consisted of only a small group which dissolved in 1913, Der Brück was influenced directly by van Gogh and Gauguin. On the other hand, while Paula Modersohn Becker (1876-1907) had never come in contact the "the Bridge" movement, she also simplified her expression of art forms to almost the primitive level that was characteristic of Der Brück. Edvard Munch (1863-1944) had influenced Der Brück with psychological insights.

Munch's art with its simplicity, its balance of values, his abstractions, his distortions, has anticipated the twentieth century.¹

This group also stirred the Fauves in Paris to much activity.

While the expressionist movement had actually been in existence prior to that time, the term "expressionism" was coined about 1911 by critics wanting to distinguish this new art movement from that of impressionism. In that early period critics also used the terms to identify Art Nouveau, Fauvism, cubism, and futurism. Later this term was only used to refer to the German movement.

The post impressionists -- van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cezanne -- strongly influenced art nouveau. The other Art Nouveau expressionists relied on an impulsive reference which led to a more intuitive and

¹Hodin, p. 60.

primitive form of art. Such an artist depended on a universal consciousness and thereby felt himself in touch with the impulses of creation. This second conception can be traced to van Gogh through Munch and the Der Brück expressionists.

The Der Blau Reiter ("The Blue Rider") is yet another group of German Expressionists. It was formed in 1911 and eventually evolved into the Bauhaus school. Including painters such as Kandinski (1866-1944) and Paul Klee (1879-1940), this group strived for a more formal conception of art than most other expressionists. The German expressionists, trying to find a distinctive German style found their hero in Gruenwald, together with the thirteenth century Northern Gothic tradition.

These painters had also been influenced greatly by the German Romantic artists, such as Runge (1777-1810) and Friedrich (1774-1840) of the eighteenth century. Strangely enough, a 1906 exhibition of these Romantic German painters had some influence on Berlin expressionists. And well they might, for Friedrich, as early as 1841, was quoted as saying:

The painter shall not paint what he sees in front of him, but what he sees inside himself ... Close your physical eye, so that you may see your vision at first with the spiritual eye. Then bring to light what you have seen in the darkness that it may invoke in the beholder a similar experience proceeding inwardly.¹

In other words, Friedrich was expressing the characteristic "I-Thou" relationship of the expressionists.

Expressionists drew on a variety of aesthetic theories which then eventually fused into their unique system of communication. For

¹Selz, p. 20, quoted by C. D. Friedrich in Carus, Friedrich Deau Landschaftmaler, Dresden, 1841.

example, when Gottfried Semper (1804-1879) set out a scientific functional basis for art, he was reacting negatively to the over ornamentation of mid-Victorian art. While he tended to leave no room for the personal creativeness of the artist, his move away from ornateness was a characteristically expressionistic attitude.

Next, they drew on Conrad Fiedler (1841-1895) for the concept of the individual creativity. He also introduced the concept that art dealt only with visual phenomenon. Fiedler's concepts could be seen functioning in the work of the post-impressionists. Van Gogh and Gauguin began to dominate their subject matter, bending it to their own personal needs and expression instead of imitating it.

Fiedler argued against the theory that art should imitate nature. He felt that imitative art only told people something they already knew; whereas, creative art gave form to new ideas, and thereby told others something fresh. Fiedler's visual perception theory liberated many artists and critics and encouraged them to seek art forms which were unmistakably unique and fresh.

Another concept which expressionists made use of was the theory of empathy as a basis for art enjoyment. Theodore Lipps (1851-1914) applied this theory to art and aesthetics. Lipps felt that object and subject could become identified with each other emotionally. By empathizing, one can achieve a mystical conception of being at one with an object. This identity with the object was not to come about through lengthy contemplation, but was suppose to happen instantly. For example, a "weeping-willow" is not really weeping; it is merely a tree. We simply feel that the branches hang

in a manner which expresses a weeping gesture. The empathy concept became very important to the expressionists. Logically line and color were used not only to identify an object, but to have an expressive quality in themselves. Thus, a line by itself can be strong, sensitive, thrusting, or straining: Therefore, it is a force that draws the viewer in harmony with the artist. Paul Gauguin used line and color expressively and symbolically -- both for their own sake and for the emotions they aroused in the viewer. The Bauhaus school of Kandinski and Paul Klee continued to use color and shape for the sake of empathy. This concept logically evolved into the abstract expressionism of DeKooning, Franz Kline, and the action painters.

Yet another aspect of expressionism was contributed by Alois Riegl (1828-1905), who set up a theory of aesthetics stressing the creative aspect of the artist. Riegl was concerned with the history of art and had to find a way of explaining changing art forms. He interpreted the history of art in terms of artistic purpose or motivation. Riegl felt that the artist molded the world to fit his purpose. He challenged the concept that art had to express ideal forms. He pointed out that what had generally been considered as decadent by the neo-classicists in late Roman art had actually been an attempt at a new form of expression. So in Riegl there is a change-over from the finished or polished product to the subjective inner-creation.

Wilhelm Wörringer (1881-), in his book Abstraction and Empathy, had combined Lipp's theory of empathy with Riegl's theory of artistic purpose. This book then became the basis guide for expressionism. Worringer shows that, historically speaking, man has

sometimes felt attached to nature and at other times felt antagonistic toward it -- denying any empathy with it. Worrenger views abstraction as an expression of an inner restlessness of man with his fate. Abstraction indicates a desire to remove oneself from nature, to look at it, and then to rearrange it.

In this abstraction, logical forms are the highest ones, the only ones in which man can find relief from the overwhelming chaos of the world as he experiences it.¹

Of course, many early twentieth century critics attempted to explain expressionism. Herman Bahr (1863-1924) agreed with Worrenger, but he followed Feidler's concept that art was a visual form. He thought that the history of art was the history of vision; so he divided it in two ways: (1) passive, sensual optical vision and (2) an active mental vision.²

"The Greek, Renaissance and Impressionistic theories," according to Bahr, "required feeling and sense reception, but make no demands on the intellect."³ The primitive, medieval and expressionistic art forms were those in which man determined the world and imposed himself on it. They expressed a mental vision which included tactile feeling and intellectual knowledge. What was created in the mind had to give a new form to what the eye perceived. Bahr hopefully suggested that a truly great art would be synthesis of the impressionistic "visual" conception with the mental vision of the expressionists. While such aesthetic theories may have influenced

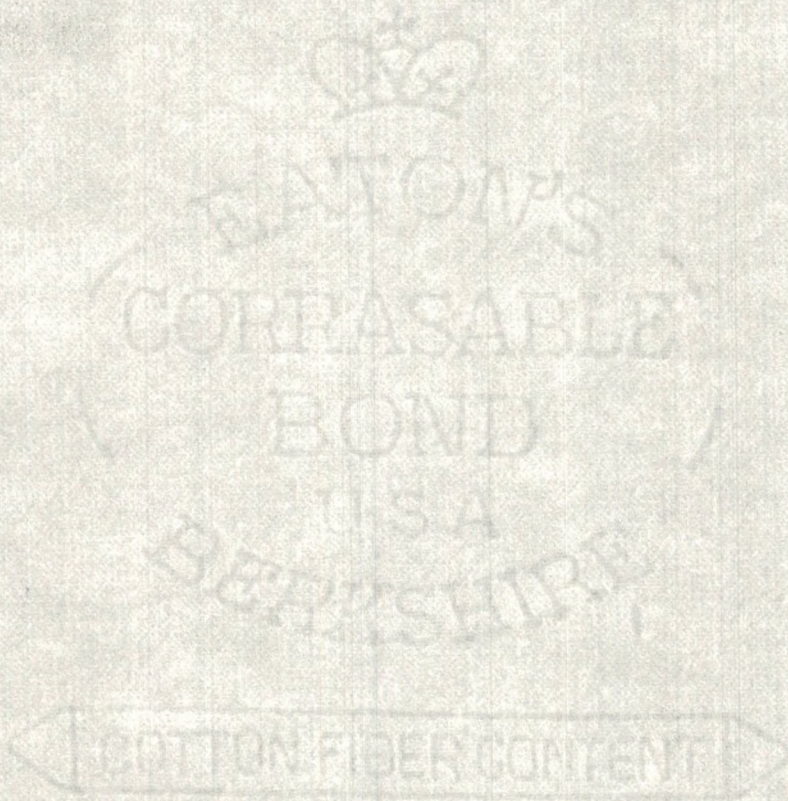
¹Wilhelm Wörringer, Abstraction and Empathy, Trans, Michael Bullock, (International University Press, New York, 1953), p. 47.

²Selz, p. 10

³Selz, p. 10

the German expressionists somewhat, the seeds of these ideas were sown before this time.

Expressionism is associated with the romantic temperament, and it has usually shown itself in times of spiritual turmoil. It seems predominately an element of the Northern European cultures; but it has been expressed in other cultures as well -- as with the Spaniard, Goya. At any rate, modern expressionism involves a new outlook on nature and reality.



CHAPTER IV
PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

In spite of many of the current trends, I believe that modern paintings must not just change for the sake of uniqueness; it must come to terms with changing philosophical concepts because man has always been concerned with external forces which affected his life -- whether physical, political or religious. Psychological forces are even more important to contemporary man. He is concerned with his personal relation to his milieu. In short, modern man recognizes that "the conflicts in our times are between psychological forces within man and the forces of environment which are both physical and psychological."¹ Painting should reflect these conflicts.

Especially in the age of color photography, there is no longer a need for literal descriptions of objects. The artist should attempt to transcend the abyss between the spiritual and physical world as one and the same. He should try to achieve an empathetic fusion between these two worlds.

Primitive man acted out his frustrations with his environment through his drawings, much as a child would. His representation of the physical world was colored by his own fantasies in his

¹Frederick Gore, Painting, Some Basic Principles, (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corp.) 1965, p. 9.

efforts to dominate the circumstances. In a strangely similar vein, the modern artist may obscure, re-interpret, re-organize, or fantasize his external world. While neither man nor machine has captured the essence of external nature, the artist may be able to do so intuitively.

Traditionally, painters have observed externals. This approach, in turn, has led to strictly representational shapes, lines, and colors. However, since photographic expression has exhausted the possibilities of the traditional forms of expression, what the artist says must be conveyed through an abstract reorganization. Such an organization must be done intuitively in order to achieve that deeper reality which lies beyond the scope of traditional forms. Through a dynamic fusion with reality, the intuition can use variations of line to heighten the literal meaning and can organize space and color relationships in order to carry out the full meaning of the work.

Nature must be reordered or exaggerated in order to heighten a meaning or aspect of nature. The artist must abstract his elements -- the rhythms, patterns, masses, weights, and movement of space. These elements give momentum to his recognizable subject matter. The emotion of his work is advanced by straight or curved lines and by shapes and colors. These things have intrinsic meaning in themselves -- meanings which must be conveyed through the artist's organization.

Drastic changes have taken place in science and in philosophy. Reason now tells us that there is more to nature than what we can see objectively. The artist must play both with reality and

with ideas of reality if he hopes to understand it. If his intuition can break through the barrier of objectivity, the artist should attempt to express his ideas in concrete and coherent forms. Then his art will contain these ideas figuratively; of course, ideas are not reality, but about reality. In giving the illusion of reality, the artist sets up forms or objects which will force others to re-examine that portion of reality which he had tried to communicate. When viewing the representation and the surface reality side by side, we see the contrasting vision of light and dark and thereby see it all. The intellectual and emotional overtones associated with a particular visual model tend to express a distinct concept of reality. This meaning, through intuitive creativity, is conjectured out of nature.

The artist must overcome the fact that, while living in a three-dimensional world, he must express himself on a two-dimensional surface. Therefore, the relationship of his painting and what it represents is symbolic.

When I paint, I seek an equilibrium between the material object and my own feelings about it. It is my aim to give objective form to my subjective feelings. What I paint springs from my unique perception of reality. While it is subjective, my work is based on my sense perception of nature. The result of my fusion with nature may be a completely introspective and non-objective work, or it may be the imitation of reality in the most objective sense. No matter which form my art takes, there is a synthesis of observed reality and personal feeling functioning in it. I do not apologize for varying my art forms, since as Hare says,

Objective creation in any form of art is that which unites the individual most closely with life and living, through

a fundamental and innate understanding, a symbiosis between man and life ... One does not live in a personalized vacuum, but while a whole, great, round, beautiful, terrifying and joyous earth, and God pity the man who turns his eyes only inward and pulls out of himself one cold, infinitely useless lump after another.¹

My own painting is quite introspective. I feel that I must somehow relate myself to the world I live in as I explore the various levels of my own inner being. Paint is just the means I use to that end, since I don't believe that making mere descriptive records of objects is adequate, the expressionist theory does influence me somewhat; however, I feel that I must maintain a more conscious control of my design and of the physical gesture through which I execute that design. For that matter, the works of the abstract expressionists are hardly as "unconscious" as they may at first seem. When analysed objectively, even De Kooning displays a highly organized composition. I feel that my reason must play an active role in my painting. Knowing that it is impossible for me not to be influenced by the past, I must strive to retain a conscious control of my painted expression to keep it my own.

Though I may appear to ignore natural forms, I actually modify them to my own ends. Sometimes I use the elements of design as an illusion of something else; at other times I use forms and colors and their inter-relationships for themselves. Sometimes I express a physiological distillation of my inner self as objectified in natural forms; at other times I seek purely aesthetic ends. I often relate my inner being to exterior nature in such a manner that I communicate recognizable forms. However, I also like to

¹John Baur, Nature in Abstraction, (New York, Whitney Museum of Art,)1958, p. 9.

to agitate the eyes of those who view my work and force those eyes to pulsate over the surface of my canvas. I want to give my viewers a visual experience; I want them to feel the impulses which flowed out of nature and into my being. As Hans Hoffman says it,

A creative mind senses and uses this life to produce motion ... Pictorial motion, therefore, reflects the impulses which the mind receives from visual experience. All forces that animate the creative act go through a process of enlightened spiritual digestion; the creative act consists, therefore, in a dual act of embodying visual and human experience in the nature of the medium of expression.¹

Consciously ignoring natural forms, I always remain alert to the qualities of movement and to the interplay of change and growth in nature. Therefore, I think that how I look at something is as vital to my painting as what I look at. One must consciously will to see because, as Hare says,

The ethics involved in 'seeing' as one is painting -- the purity of the act, so to speak -- is more actual to me than preassumed images or ideas of picture structure: but this is half the story: I doubt that this ethic would be real enough without the 'pull' of the known image for its own 'light' or its sense of place. It is like the impossibility of living entirely in the moment without the tug of memory. The resistance of forms against losing their identities, with, however, their desire to partake of each other, leads finally to a showdown, as they shed their minor relations and confront each other more nakedly.²

So we see that the artist who has no image in mind has not really seen anything to communicate to others. He has been blind to both himself and to the outside world.

My knowledge of philosophy has instilled in me a longing to see the real life behind the visible and known. If possible, I

¹Baur, p. 10

²Baur, p. 10

would like to express this sub-surface essence -- the life force itself. There is a real challenge in this endeavor, as well as a good deal of frustration.

That there is a unity (in nature) few artists doubt. But as Einstein once pointed out, believing in the concept of unity in nature -- as he did himself -- is an act of faith. The faith, often sorely tried, exists in the artist. But the image of unity is by nature elusive ... The artist must be prepared to live in a state of perpetual uncertainty pursuing the elusive 'truth' which is always felt to be there but is never found.¹

Earlier in my paper I touched on three concepts of nature. In those three periods of history all artists have puzzled over how to put together perceived physical reality and personal ideas of reality in order to communicate an idea. Sometimes a tree is a quivering unity; however, at other times the essence of the tree pulls apart into scattered leaves. Can we see both views at once? I find myself going from one view to the other. As I see the leaves individually, they fuse into the foliage as a whole; and as I view the foliage, it changes, moves, fluctuates, and decomposes. In short what I see is "teeming cohesion, contained dispersal."² Therefore I must search out a way to communicate this paradox which I perceive.

Any object, brush stroke, or a patch of color has definite limitations and dimensions. While I want to define an object in my work, I do not want to enclose it with line or to limit or arrest its motion. I want surrounding space to function vitally in order to keep my objects vibrant and alive. I do not want to indicate clear boundaries. I want my lines to contain and define without

¹Dore Ashton, Philip Guston, (New York: Grove Press, Inc.,) 1950, p. 10

²John-Paul Sarte, Situations, (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc.) 1966, p. 131.

stifling the emotions they express.

Are there really boundaries in a world which science tells us is made up of swirling atoms? When I stare at the edge of a table, it seems unreal. Its edges are no longer sharp and precise, nor is its position in space stable. The edges become soft and undulating. New things come into my vision, and other things move out. I would like to represent all of these movements. When I attempt to convey this in a work, the brush strokes do run the danger of becoming so fragmented that the work borders on chaos. I fight against this chaos while fighting to retain the conception, but I'm confounded again.

One might image that realism consists in copying ... a glass just as it is on the table. But, in fact you never copy the glass on the table, --- you copy the residue of the vision. Every time I look at the glass it gives the impression of reforming itself. One sees it as though it were disappearing and appearing again. It always finds itself between being and non-being and that is what one wants to copy. ... The great adventure is to see, each day in the same face, something unknown surge forth.¹

"Things" are always changing over into something else. It is this "becoming" process with which I become involved in my painting. In the painting of a landscape, I am very much concerned with the motion that takes place in nature. This motion or changing is the most important part of my conception of nature and life. Things cannot be frozen in an animated state of being, for they do not exist in this way. They only exist in time, and time implies motion and change.

My paintings and drawings are based upon this visual sense

¹Mercedes Matter, "Giacomitti", Life, Vol. 60, No. 4, (Jan. 28, 1966), pp. 59-60.

perception. Therefore, while I see things as they appear now, I also attempt to anticipate what they will become. I attempt to present flashes of reality without completely portraying them.

Perhaps the complexities of the theory behind my paintings will seem more clear when I present specific examples of the results I have achieved in paint.

Figure I, Landscape Triptych, is a three panelled painting on masonite. Each panel is a full eight by four feet sheet. I found the large size stimulating to my way of painting. The subject matter is no one particular landscape. It is a collection of impulses about nature in its operation -- impulses radiating from what the Greeks would have called the Soul inside this physical matter. In this piece, the brush strokes become very important in relation to the size of the masonite; contrasting with the large surface, the brush strokes are small -- almost Baroque in its movement. The lines created by these brush strokes are twisted and contorted -- entwining, appearing, and disappearing. They give a feeling of a somewhat chaotic, fluctuating, and fleeting vision. These linear brush strokes also convey a certain vitality in an expressionistic sense.

This involvement with line carries through most of my other paintings; in other words, I consider the most important and expressive of the visual elements. For example, in Figure II, Prairie Flowers, line is again used to heighten the entangled feeling of foliage. The painting expresses a certain amount of twisting into organized forms. Such effects are designed to arouse an entirely different response than did Figure I.

I have interlaced line, tone and color in Figure V, Winter scape. This work is similar to a Jackson Pollock in its interweaving

of paint. In this painting, I have utilized the small brush strokes as part of the spontaneity and vitality of the physical act of painting. Pollocks lines are smooth and curvilinear. My painting has a more angular knotted line because I have sought a completely different expressive quality. I attempt to fluctuate small shapes into lines which, in turn, develop to make the image separate from the background. This background functions as a backdrop for the image. However, I still try to make the whole surface work as one single pulsating unit.

In other works -- Figures III and IV -- I mass my lines in order to create tonal areas. I work with soft lead pencil on index paper to achieve a rich surface. Figure III, Interior with Flowers, expresses the feeling of a room interior through some of the organic forms within it. The space is enclosed. On the other hand, Figure IV, Tabletop, expresses more airiness and space because only a table and a plant strike the eye. Both of these drawings drew on my intuitive impulses. The imagery evolved into organic forms. I attempt to achieve a growing, moving quality through these particular organic shapes.

While these illustrations may help the reader to understand what I have been attempting to do, he must realize that I am still striving toward a very exciting ideal which I only imperfectly perceive. Classical, Baroque, and Modern painters have sought their own ideal concepts; because my concept is structured as an extension constructed on the foundations laid by these other painters, perhaps I shall be able to achieve a real fusion with the inner essences of nature.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to express my conclusions on my canvases because paint is vital and vividly expressive on the canvas. Paint assails the senses. No one can remain neutral to paint. On the other hand, words tend to remain dead on the page until a reader makes a special effort of will to give them life. When I turn to terms like Baroque and Romantic, which cannot hope to do justice to the various aspects of the Baroque and Romantic movements, I feel frustrated by their inadequacy. However, I have tried to use such words to trace the counter art movements through Classical, Romantic, and Modern epochs. These epochs, far from being mere anticipations of repetitions of any other period's phase or style, are unique in their particular configurations.

Throughout these epochs, artists attempted to maintain the movement of the moment. Inner tensions between Classic-Romantic forces maintained a static-dynamic relationship. This paradoxical use of words attempts to express human complexity: while "static" points out that "forces at rest tend to remain at rest or in equilibrium,"¹ "dynamic" indicates that "moving forces tend to remain in motion."² All word descriptions of art periods become more meaningful in paint, for there was no period in which art was completely

¹Webster's New World Dictionary, College Edition.

²Webster's Dictionary.

"static." Even in contemporary abstract art, a style which appears willfully to neglect reality in life and nature and which rejects photographic representation of objects or scenes, certain elements of classical form do persist, though greatly simplified. The contemporary abstract painter seeks to get beyond the mere imitation of surfaces; but in so doing, he may well, for example, turn to the triangular patterns of composition preferred during the Renaissance. He may well be influenced by other canons of "correct" and idealized proportions. For example, the radical geometrics of the cubist may have evolved out of the sober prisms of Egyptian pyramids and obelisks.

When an expressionistic sculptor starts working from life and nature, but violates or stretches correct proportions in order to dematerialize the forms, he is not doing something new. This is what the sculptors of the twelfth century did, this is what Greco did to help his saints to conquer their earthly bounds, and this is what primitive Africans did to visualize their fetishes. On the other hand, when a modern painter uses meaningless ornamental dashes to convey energy, restlessness and infinitude, he only parallels ornamentals found in the decorations of ancient Scandinavia, India, and the Orient.

While using the classic approach may present the thing as it ideally is and while using the romantic approach may present it as it appears to the senses, the painter still knows that he will probably fail to communicate the total thing. As Mondrian said, "Things give us everything: their representations give us nothing."¹

¹David Lewis, Mondrian, (New York: George Whittenborn, Inc.) n.d., p. 8.

This frustration has taunted painters from the formulation of these contrasting polar concepts: Classical and Romantic. These specific and rigid concepts have unconsciously moderated toward compromises which have allowed some evolution to take place. In the modern classical mode, the evolution worked from Cezanne, to Cubism, to the formal abstraction of Mondrian, and finally to the Op art and Minimal art of today. In a similar way, we can trace modern romanticism from van Gogh, to the German Expressionists, and eventually to Abstract Expressionism.

Am I foolish if I make yet another attempt to resolve the conflict between the Classical and Romantic concepts? Mondrian noted,

If one has loved the surface of things for a long time, one will finally look for something more. This 'more', however, is already present in the surface one wants to go beyond. Through the surface, one sees the inner side of things; it is as we regard the surface that the inward image takes shape in our souls. This is the image we are to represent.¹

Such a representation has always been the goal of the Classical painter -- this reaching for the ideal. Frustration has always come with the realization that while "the natural surface of things is beautiful ... the imitation of this surface is lifeless."²

Hence, we need to make use of some romantic forms of expression if we hope to vitalize our canvases.

Either consciously or unconsciously, I combined flat surfaces, shallow space, and usually associated with Classical painters together with the painterly strokes and subject matter of the Romantics.

¹Lewis, p. 8.

²Lewis, p. 8.

I have found myself a part of the modern Renaissance of art, and I have made many exciting discoveries in tracing its foundations. While surfaces are important, that which lies beneath the surface should not be ignored. The findings of Jung on the collective unconscious indicate that a deep well of untapped knowledge resides in the subconscious. As we look deeper and attempt to communicate what we find, we begin to discard one innovation after another or to combine various of the art forms. In so doing, we must not discard all of the old forms while reaching for the new. Those who have gone before us were not so far from the truth. We are still men and live on this earth, and the expressions and the insights into man that ancient art has furnished us do have relevance today. Man has faced many of the same problems, but he must seek expression that has potential to expand contemporary man.



Figure I
Landscape Triptych
Oil on Masonite



Figure II
Prairie Flowers
Oil on Canvas



Figure III
Interior with Flowers
pencil on index paper



Figure IV
Tabletop
pencil on index paper



Figure V
Winterscape
Oil on Canvas

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